



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

Universitätsbibliothek Paderborn

Remarks On The Life and Writings Of Dr. Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin

Orrery, John Boyle of

London, 1752

Of Epicurus.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-49109](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-49109)

with a view to refute his opinion. Like the Ottoman Emperor, he could not reign in safety, till he had first destroyed his brethren. He was as ambitious in science, as his pupil ALEXANDER was in arms. He aimed to be a despotic original: and not only to be the Prince, but the Tyrant of philosophy. What then can be expected from the commentators of his works, who were devoid of his ingenuity, and possessed of all his intricate follies? RAMUS with his covert ignorance, and SCOTUS and AQUINAS with their subdivisions, and imaginary nothings, must make a contemptible figure in the Elysian fields, which are the supposed mansions of cheerfulness, truth, and candour, and consequently must be a very improper situation for that tribe of philosophers.

*“ I then desired, says GULLIVER, that DESCARTES
 “ and GASSENDI might be called up: with whom I
 “ prevailed to explain their systems to ARISTOTLE. This
 “ great philosopher freely acknowledged his own mistakes
 “ in natural philosophy, because he proceeded in many things
 “ upon conjecture, as all men must do; and he found that
 “ GASSENDI, who had made the doctrine of EPICURUS
 “ as palatable as he could, and the vortices of DESCAR-
 “ TES, were equally to be exploded.”* I believe you will find, my dear HAMILTON, that ARISTOTLE is still to be preferred to EPICURUS. The former made some useful experiments and discoveries, and was engaged in a real pursuit of knowledge, although his manner is much perplexed. The latter was full of vanity and ambition. He was an impostor, and only aimed at de-

deceiving. He seemed not to believe the principles which he has asserted. He committed the government of all things to chance. His natural philosophy is absurd. His moral philosophy wants its proper basis, the fear of God. Monsieur BAYLE, one of his warmest advocates, is of this last opinion, where he says, "*On ne scauroit pas dire assez de bien de l'honnêteté de ses mœurs, ni assez de mal de ses opinions sur la religion.*" His general maxim, that happiness consisted in pleasure was too much unguarded, and must lay a foundation of a most destructive practice: although from his temper and constitution, he made his actions sufficiently pleasurable to himself, and agreeable to the rules of true philosophy. His fortune exempted him from care and sollicitude. His valetudinarian habit of body from intemperance. He passed the greatest part of his time in his garden, where he enjoyed all the elegant amusements of life. There he studied. There he taught his philosophy. This particular happy situation greatly contributed to that tranquility of mind, and indolence of body which he made his chief ends. He had not however resolution sufficient to meet the gradual approaches of death, and wanted that constancy which Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE ascribes to him: for in his last moments, when he found that his condition was desperate, he took such large draughts of wine, that he was absolutely intoxicated, and deprived of his senses; so that he died more like a bacchanal, than a philosopher: to which the epigram alludes,

I

Hint

Hinc Stygias ebrius hausit aquas.

I should not have ventured into this criticism and censure upon these antient philosophers, not even to you, my dearest HAM, if my opinion was not in a great measure supported by Lord BACON, who, as he was certainly the most accurate judge of this subject, might be perhaps, from that pre-eminence, too severe a critic. It must be owned, that EPICURUS in particular has many followers and admirers among the antients, and among the moderns. CICERO commends him for cultivating his friendships in the most exquisite manner. The book lyes open before me, and I will transcribe the words, *De quâ [amicitiâ] EPICURUS quidem ita dicit omnium rerum quas ad beatè vivendum sapientia comparaverit, nihil esse majus amicitia, nihil uberior, nihil jucundius, neque verò hoc oratione solum, sed multo magis vita et factis, et moribus comprobavit.* DIOGENES LAERTIUS praises his virtue and learning. In the Augustan age the greatest names are inserted among his followers. CÆSAR, ATTICUS, MECÆNAS, LUCRETIUS, VIRGIL, and HORACE embraced his philosophy, and gave a lustre to his sect, and doctrines. Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE says, “ that he wonders, why
“ such sharp invectives were so generally made against
“ EPICURUS, by the ages that followed him: especially
“ as his admirable wit, felicity of expression, excellence
“ of nature, sweetness of conversation, temperance of life,
“ and constancy of death, made him so much beloved by
“ his

AND WRITINGS OF DR. SWIFT. 115

“ his friends, admired by his scholars, and honoured by the Athenians.” Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE imputes this injustice “ to the envy, and malignity of the Stoics, and to some gross pretenders, who assumed the denomination of that sect : who mistook his favourite principle” (THAT ALL HAPPINESS CONSISTED IN PLEASURE) “ by confining it to sensual pleasure only. To these succeeded the Christians, who esteemed his principles of natural philosophy more opposite to those of our religion than either the Platonists, the Peripatetics, or even the Stoics themselves.” This is the opinion, and these are almost the exact words of the great Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE.

SWIFT equally explodes EPICURUS, and the more modern philosophers DESCARTES and GASSENDI.

DESCARTES was a knight errant in philosophy, perpetually mistaking windmills for giants ; yet by the strength of a warm imagination he started some opinions, which probably put Sir ISAAC NEWTON, and others, on making many experiments that produced most useful discoveries.

GASSENDI was esteemed one of the greatest ornaments of FRANCE. He was a doctor of divinity, and royal professor of mathematics. He was born in Provence in 1592, and died in 1655. With great industry he collected whatever related to the person, and to the philosophy of EPICURUS, the latter of which, he has reduced into a compleat system.

I have now, my HAMILTON, cursorily gone through the characters of such ghosts, as are nominally
I 2 specified